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AUTHOR DeEsch, Jesse B.
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ABSTRACT

The counseling profession must provide therapeutic cpportunities that help disruptive and alientated youth adjust to the realities of society in a manner that is psychologically healthful to the individual, the school, and the community. A therapeutic group counseling model which focused upon the definition and implementation of specific goals identified by individual members during an intake interview was used to determine if disruptive students could assume responsibility for their own effective and active involvement in their educational experience and psychological development. Students (N=97) were randomly assigned to sever control and seven treatment groups. Treatment groups met from 9 to 12 weeks and ranged in size from 5 to 7 members. Results indicated that group counseling decreased school conflict and improved the self-concept of the disruptive youth. The counseled groups decreased their referrals to the discipline office and improved their academic achievement. (Author/HLM)

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GROUP COUNSELING WITH DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS

Jesse B. DeEsch, Ph.D.

School of Education, Rider College

Lawrenceville, New Jersey

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Group Counseling with Disruptive Students

Jesse B. DeEsch, Ph.D.

The school counselor's involvement with disciplinary problem students has been a recurring concern within the counseling profession since the 1940's. Early literature warns counselors not to become involved with disciplinary responsibilities since the counseling relationship should be voluntary rather than mandatory (Williamson & Foley 1949). Patterson (1965) indicates that a counselor's role should not include responsibility for discipline or punishment. This role, however, should include counseling with disruptive and behavior problem students in an attempt to help them gain self-respect and self-control. In counseling with the disruptive or alienated youth, Arbuckle (1971) considers the counselor's contribution as one of narrowing the gap between the society of the alienated youth and the society of the adult. He recommends that through counseling services the school should assist the alienated youth to become responsible rather than reinforce and accept irresponsible behavior. The counselor cannot, in good conscience, ignore the needs of the disruptive and alienated youth. The counseling profession must provide therapeutic opportunities that help the disruptive and alienated youth adjust to the realities of society in a manner that is psychologically healthful to the individual, the school, and the community. The study reported in this article was conducted to test this rationale.

The study was designed to use a model of group counseling that was thought to provide a therapeutic atmosphere in which disruptive students have the opportunity to gain responsibility for their own effective and active involvement in their educational experience and their psychological development. As the results of the study indicate, this group process helped disruptive students acquire some of the basic patterns of thinking

Jesse DeEsch is Assistant Professor of Education, Counselor Education, Division of Graduate Studies, School of Education, Rider College, Lawrenceville, New Jersey.

and behaving that enabled them to interact more successfully within the school.

Group Counseling Model

The model of group counseling used in this research project was developed by Ohlsen (1977). The model focuses upon the definition and implementation of specific goals which individual members identify during an intake interview. The intake interview is a one-to-one session between the counselor and the prospective group member, conducted for the purpose of establishing specific client goals and client commitment. Clarity and reality of goals are as critical as the prospective member's motivation to be involved in the group counseling process. These individualized goals are the means by which clients appraise their own unique growth patterns. The counselor helps clients learn to use the evidence of their own growth as reinforcement for self-declared and desired behavioral changes.

Structuring exists throughout the treatment period, with the primary guide being the personal goals of the group members. As treatment progresses, the group members, by prior agreement in the intake interview and initial group sessions, become the clarifiers and encouragers for implementation of desired new behaviors. The group members expand and focus upon their concerns and the development of self-confidence. The counselor becomes a facilitator of communication of the group's concerns. The counselor assists the group in planning action and develops and encourages the practice of necessary skills to implement desired new behaviors.

Methodology

Participants. Research participants were selected from the seventh through tenth grades of a suburban school district in Eastern Pennsylvania.

Potential participants were the students who most frequently disrupted the educational process in the classroom and within the total operation of the school. Frequency of referral to the discipline office (the 10 percent most frequently referred during the first 10 weeks of school) was the means of identifying the potential research participants.

A student was considered a group counseling research participant after reaching a mutual agreement with the research counselor on commitment to attain goals, commitment to be a member of the group, and commitment to help other group members attain their goals. This determination was made through a group counseling presentation and an intake interview.

Of the initial 180 potential research participants approached, 135 indicated a desire to be involved in the group counseling. Following the intake interviews, 97 students were accepted as potential group members. They were randomly assigned to 14 counseling groups, seven of which were treatment groups (n=49) and seven of which were control groups (n=48). Three of the 49 students dropped from the treatment groups prior to the completion of the research project, two because they moved and one for personal reasons. Five of the original students in the control groups withdrew from school before the completion of the research.

Procedure. Treatment groups met for a minimum of 10 but not more than 12 sessions, with each session one hour in length. The sessions were conducted for a minimum of nine but not more than 10 weeks. The size of the groups ranged from a minimum of five to a maximum of seven members. The major criteria in establishing these counseling groups included: sex balance, social maturity, intellectual compatibility, and compatibility of personal goals.

During the period of group counseling for the treatment groups, the control groups received no group counseling. Research measures were administered to the treatment groups and control groups at the onset of the experiment and at the conclusion of the 10-week counseling experience. The same measures were administered again for the treatment groups after a 10-week follow-up period. There was no 10-week follow-up measure for the control groups since they experienced the actual group counseling during this time period, thus changing their research status and eliminating them from valid comparative statistical measure.

Instrumentation. The criterion measures included a teacher-rated Pupil Behavior Inventory, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS), the participants' grade-point averages (GPA), and the number of referrals to the student discipline office. The teacher-rated Pupil Behavior Inventory was originally designed to evaluate developmental growth of the student. It has been used during the previous 20 years of the school district's existence. The inventory requires the teacher to indicate a student's behavior on a five-point scale for the following traits: emotional stability, integrity, responsibility, concern for others, influence on others, initiative, industry, and seriousness of purpose.

The TSCS (Fitts 1965) is designed for persons age 12 and older and measures 24 aspects of a person's self-concept. It is a standardized instrument frequently used to measure self-concept with adolescents and juvenile delinquents. Two of the critical measures of the TSCS are the Total Positive Index and the Number of Deviant Signs Score--the two indicators used in this study. Most of the TSCS reliability coefficients cited in the TSCS Manual range from .80 to .90 (Fitts 1965). The TSCS Manual

also reports high validity correlations with instruments as the MMPI and the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (Fitts 1965).

The GPA was calculated for each participant on the basis of the four major courses of study being carried by the student. The GPA index was determined by equating a grade of A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1 and F=0 and was calculated for each participant at each measurement period.

The frequency of referrals to the dsicipline office was tallied for each participant during the 10 weeks prior to the research, during the 10 weeks of treatment, and during the 10 weeks following the treatment for the treatment group; the control group was no longer part of the research project following the 10-week treatment period. Any time a student was sent to the discipline office for reason of disruptiveness to the education process constituted a referral.

Three of the research questions to be answered through the use of these measures were: a) Was participation in group counseling accompanied by change in school behavior as measured by referral to the discipline office and the Pupil Behavior Inventory? b) Was participation in group counseling accompanied by a change in self-concept as measured by the TSCS? c) Was participation in group counseling accompanied by improved academic performance as measured by GPA?

Findings

The results of this research indicate that group counseling decreases school conflict and improves the self-concept of disruptive youth in a secondary school. Two criterion measures were used to assess change in disruptive students' school behavior. The teacher-rated Pupil Behavior Inventory reflected no statistical change. However, when a statistical

comparison was made on referrals to the discipline office between the treated group and the control group the F-ratio associated with the interaction between all measurement periods and the two groups attained a level of significance of $p < .001$. The counseled group decreased in referrals to the discipline office from the pre-measure to the post-measure and continued the decrease through to the follow-up measure. At the same time the control group increased the frequency of referral from the pre-measure to the post-measure. The result of this analysis is shown in Table 1. Table 2 shows the significant F-ratio for the comparison of the pre-measure to the follow-up measure for the treated group. The change for this measure attained a level of significance of $p < .01$.

Table 1

ANOVA for Repeated Measures in a Two Dimensional Design on the Frequency of Referral to the Discipline Office with the Treated and Control Groups

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F
Total between subjects	495.949	87		
Between treatment and control groups	18.460	1	18.460	3.325
Between subjects within treatment and control	477.489	86	5.552	
Total within subjects	397.500	88		
Between measurement periods	0.006	1	0.006	0.001
Interaction: measurement periods x groups	49.142	1	49.142	12.132***
Interaction: pooled subjects x measurement periods	348.352	86	4.051	

***$p < .001$

Table 2

ANOVA Single Factor Experiment with Repeated Measures on Frequency of Referral to the Discipline Office from Pre- to Follow-up Measures For the Treated Group

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F
Between the subjects	320.545	43		
Within the subjects	267.333	88		
Between the measurement periods	35.924	2	17.962	6.675**
Residual	231.409	86	2.691	
Total	587.879	131		

**$p < .01$

Participation in group counseling also resulted in positive change in the self-concept of the disruptive students, as measured by the TSCS. When change was measured by the use of the Total Positive Score of the TSCS the F-ratio that resulted from this analysis of variance reflected a significant change ($p < .05$). Table 3 shows the statistical analysis of the treated students' scores when compared from the pre-measure through to the follow-up measure.

Table 3

ANOVA Single Factor Experiment with Repeated Measures on the Total Positive Score of the TSCS from Pre- to Follow-up Measures for the Treated Group

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F
Between the subjects	103957.598	43		
Within the subjects	23520.667	88		
Between the measurement periods	2125.015	2	1062.508	4.274*
Residual	21377.652	86	248.577	
Total	127460.265	131		

*$p < .05$

Similarly, when the Number of Deviant Signs Score of the TSCS was analyzed from the pre- to the follow-up measurement periods for the treated group, a significant difference ($p < .001$) was found. Table 4 shows the significant F-ratio for the Number of Deviant Signs Score criterion measure.

Table 4

ANOVA Single Factor Experiment with Repeated Measures on the Number of Deviant Signs Score of the TSCS from Pre- to Follow-up Measures for the Treated Group

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F
Between the subjects	11477.720	43		
Within the subjects	7740.000	88		
Between the measurement periods	1145.879	2	572.939	7.472***
Residual	6594.121	86	76.676	
Total	19217.720	131		

***p. < .001

The criterion measure used to assess change in academic achievement was GPA. The statistical analysis of the GPA shows an F-ratio that is significant ($p < .01$) when comparing the treated group's pre- and post-measures as reported in Table 5. Although there was a slight drop in the treated group's GPA from the post-measure to the follow-up measure the overall change continued to be enough to remain significant ($p < .05$). Conversely, the control group's GPA decreased from the pre- to the post-measure but not enough to reflect an F-ratio of statistical significance ($p < .055$) when compared to the change within the treated group.

Table 5

ANOVA Single Factor Experiment with Repeated Measures on the GPA from Pre- to Post-Measures for the Treated Group

SOURCE of VARIATION	SS	DF	MS	F
Between the subjects	1411.943	43		
Within the subjects	87.500	44		
Between the measurement periods	12.375	1	12.375	7.083**
Residual	75.125	43	1.747	
Total	1499.443	87		

**$p < .01$

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the research participants, disruptive secondary school students involved in group counseling, changed on two levels: a) they initiated action that brought positive results in their school behavior and academic performance; and b) they increased their self-concept. On the basis of the findings of this study, the group counseling process appears to significantly reduce the number of referrals to the discipline office. Fifty-seven percent of the treated group and 50 percent of the control group had specific goals related to improved classroom and school behavior. Although both groups wanted to improve, members of the counseled group made significant progress in attaining this type of goal, while members of the non-counseled group increased their referral frequency to the discipline office. The difference in response of the counseled versus the non-counseled group may be attributed to the components of the group counseling model: experiencing the sharing process and learning to seek alternatives for change.

The students who were involved in group counseling increased their self-respect as measured by the TSCS. This finding suggests that as disruptive students' conflict in school are reduced their self-concept is enhanced and as their self-concept is enhanced they are able to behave in a manner that results in less school conflict. When these alienated students were allowed to become involved in a helping, relatively free, and therapeutic atmosphere, not only did they begin to respond more productively in school, but they also felt better about themselves.

The positive movement of the counseled students was also evident in their increased GPA. An explanation for the significant change in the counseled group may be related to the fact that 45 percent of the research participants had a goal to improve academic performance. The members in each of the counseling groups within the overall treatment group worked at helping themselves and each other to improve study skills, classroom discussion skills, test-taking skills, and similar skills related to improved classroom performance. It was apparent that many of the group members benefited by the positive support received through the group process. The group process appears to have helped the student to feel more confident and to become more positively involved in the improvement of academic performance. The loss of this support may explain the slight regression in GPA that occurred from the post-measure to the follow-up measure within the treated group.

While it cannot be concluded that this form of group counseling, or any form of counseling, is the answer to creating a change in the student's compatibility with the school norms, it can be assumed that group counseling is accompanied by a change in behavior which better meets the needs of the student than present methods of punishment. In addition, students

involved in the counseling experience verbalized their satisfaction with being able to express feelings openly within a confidential setting while being heard and understood by others.

The benefit for the school counselor is the delivery of effective professional service to a special population of the school. As successes such as these occur the faculty, administration, and community will become more receptive to the counselor's being a professional agent of change. The results of this study suggest a means of enhancing the "therapeutic" dimension of the school counselor by providing meaningful and productive counseling services to a neglected school population through the use of a specific style of group counseling.

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